

Should Religious Faith be Kept Private and Kept out of Politics?

A religion is a structure. Faith holds up the structure and the whole thing collapses without it. It weakens if faith is weak.

Religious faith when public can cause and has caused a lot of trouble and violence. Imagine what religion would do if it were less social! A bad religion is curbed a bit by its place in society. Being social can stop you wanting to hurt people just because they are not members of your faith group. It is thought that if you are not in an organised religion then you miss out on the guidance of people wiser than you in the religion and so your private religion is taking a step towards religious fanaticism or holy anarchy. Studies have shown that the "I'm spiritual but not religious" brigade are prone to religious craziness and they are effectively still religious. A person who is their own religion is still a religionist. Secularism wants you to confine religion to the privacy of your home and for you to keep it out of civic life. Secularism however is reasoning, "If you are going to be religious then be privately religious." This is tolerance rather than acceptance. It is reluctance. The reality is that private religion is dangerous. Secularism hopes that private religion will vanish too. It however has to let it vanish and cannot force it to.

Religion when irrational makes not just its members irrational but its sympathisers. That is why non-denominational, "spiritual", even atheistic, LGBT people will promote Jesus as a model of acceptance and the evidence that this is rubbish goes right over their heads. Rubbish when it gets a lot of power can cloak itself in fake validity. It gets acceptance or tolerance from lazy people who should shout that the emperor has no clothes. The religious problem is not just about the members.

Fact - religion is inherently non-private

Religion comes from a word that relates to obligation. It is considered an obligation to belong to the "true" religion and to stay in it and to support it by trying to help others find it attractive and by giving it money and by protecting its rights and its "rights" by law. Religion then is inherently about society or part of it and thus is not a private affair. Religion teaches doctrines about human nature and what it should do and believe and how it should worship. As these doctrines come from God who ultimately owns all people, the doctrines apply to all people on earth as such. That is why the popes do not ban contraception for Catholics only but for everybody. That is why Muslims are adamant that anybody who insults the Koran is bad and the insulter being a Muslim or ex-Muslim is irrelevant. The condemnation applies to anybody. It is possible that religionists who say they would not force their values on others are lying. If they are as religious as they claim then they have to. After all it is reasoned that if a religion does not force something else will and that is true. Even liberals can and do force their views on stricter people. It sadly is how things are so something always has to be forced.

Think

Religion is a public representation of faith. Faith is private in the sense that only you can develop it but public in the sense that it demands to be acted on and that you get involved in religion.

Is demanding that religion or faith be kept private a form of intolerance towards religion? Yes.

Is the intolerance necessary and can it be prevented from escalating into violence? Sometimes.

There is more to religious faith and religion than God and scriptures and saviours. No person of faith really lives on the word of God alone though they claim they should. The martyrs may have a death wish or want to escape this world. The nuns are guaranteed food and shelter. Most believers would not sacrifice for God but would cross land and see to see some ridiculous miracle that has little or no impact on their spiritual life. It is almost as if religion is not as faith based as you would be led to believe. Countless things make that apparent. The believer who imagines he gets answers from Jesus in regular prayer and shows no interest in learning about Jesus in the Bible is a fantasist more than a person of faith.

The secular and the religious is difficult or impossible to distinguish in a person of faith. Cleaning out the stove is a religious act for the Christian. It is offered to God. Not everything that looks non-religious is non-religious and not everything that looks religious is religious. There are overlaps. That is why when Catholics want the land and Protestants want it and there is bloodshed they may not mention faith matters but faith could still be involved. For example, the Catholic or Protestant could be motivated by the desire to have the land for he thinks God wants him to. Indeed they would not fight at all unless they thought God intended to give them the land if they fight for it. Nobody gets land if God works against them.

It is up to evidence not theory to define what religion is. Religion is an action of some sort. If all religions are really about

people using God and magical beliefs to get their own way - perhaps political influence, a sense of power or praise - then religion is a form of manipulation.

Practical

Modern secularism sees itself a neutral space between non-religion and religion and as a neutral space between different religions. Thus no religious teaching can be allowed special treatment under the law. If the state shares a religion's view of a particular issue, the state may create a law based on that view. But it will not do it because a religion says so but because religion or not, the view makes sense. But in principle, faith is kept out of politics. It is consigned to the private realm.

It is clear that religious faith or belief should be private. But it is not that simple.

Religious belief is not merely private. Most people would say that. I would add that it never is just private. If you really believe something it will determine how you affect others and the stronger the faith the stronger the effect. Also, many religious ideas are set up to confirm themselves. For example, a person carries a rabbits foot for good luck. The person then decides that all the good things are his because of the rabbit's foot. He ignores the bad or thinks that the bad had to happen for the good to happen. If the person thought atheism was lucky or Satanism he would get the same result. Everything good is taken as proof that the enchantment is working so the more good that you notice in your life the stronger your faith will become. The result will be a person who does not keep their faith private.

You are part of society so your beliefs have to affect it.

Religious beliefs influence how people vote and some terrorists are voted into public office and the seats of power purely because they had the support of the religious vote.

I would add too that beliefs have an indirect effect on society. A good example is how Catholics say they believe the Bible. In Northern Ireland, any Unionist Protestant who wants to suppress Catholics can feel that the Catholic belief in the Bible is allaying any doubts he has about the Bible and its goodness. He feels that his own faith in the Bible is validated by others believing in it especially those who he considers to be heretics and not real Christians. He might deny the Catholic but as we are part of society we cannot stop being indirectly influenced by others. Catholics need to explicitly repudiate the Bible and its authority and its goodness.

Religion often makes it a moral obligation to follow crazy ethical rules and to believe insane and far-fetched doctrines. The teaching that a little boy who masturbates believing that it is a grave sin and who does it freely deserves to suffer for it in Hell for all eternity, is just making a laughing stock of morality. Religion enables the evils of moral relativism and hypocrisy when it lacks scientific or ethical credibility. Then any good rules it has start to look arbitrary or like mere opinions not to be taken too seriously. The good is lost with the bad.

If somebody expresses a view you disagree with, then you respond in different ways. Not responding is responding and letting the person hold the view. Agreeing with the person would be fake. Challenging the view is the right option for there is nothing wrong with asking a person why they think as they do and why it is good to think that.

If the person has the right to hold the view, you have the right to discourage it if it is wrong or if you strongly disagree with it. The sillier or more dangerous the rule is the more you have the right. Church and state being separate does not mean that the state should encourage faith. It has the right to permit but discourage it.

Though faith is not really private, your inner life is definitely private and no priest has the right to look into it, to preach at it or give you sacraments to tamper with it. This applies even more so when you are a child.

Faith is never wholly private but it can be VERY private. Don't forget that!

Secularism is right that faith should be kept out of politics and pushed into the private realm. But religion cannot countenance that. It would no longer be religion if it tried to.

Make your choice: the human right which is secularism or the human privilege (a privilege is not a right but an extra) which is religion.

Faith in a secular state

Freedom of religion is too often limited to freedom to attend ceremonies and worship based around religion. The freedom of worship would not be practiced unless somebody was expressing a faith. If nobody speaks the x faith the x faith will not exist. There will be no worship. So freedom of religious expression matters more than freedom of worship. The two are

linked but are not the same thing. There is a sense in which worship speaks and preaches the faith. Secularism urges faith to be private and so conflict between the fundamental right to be secular and religious privilege will happen.